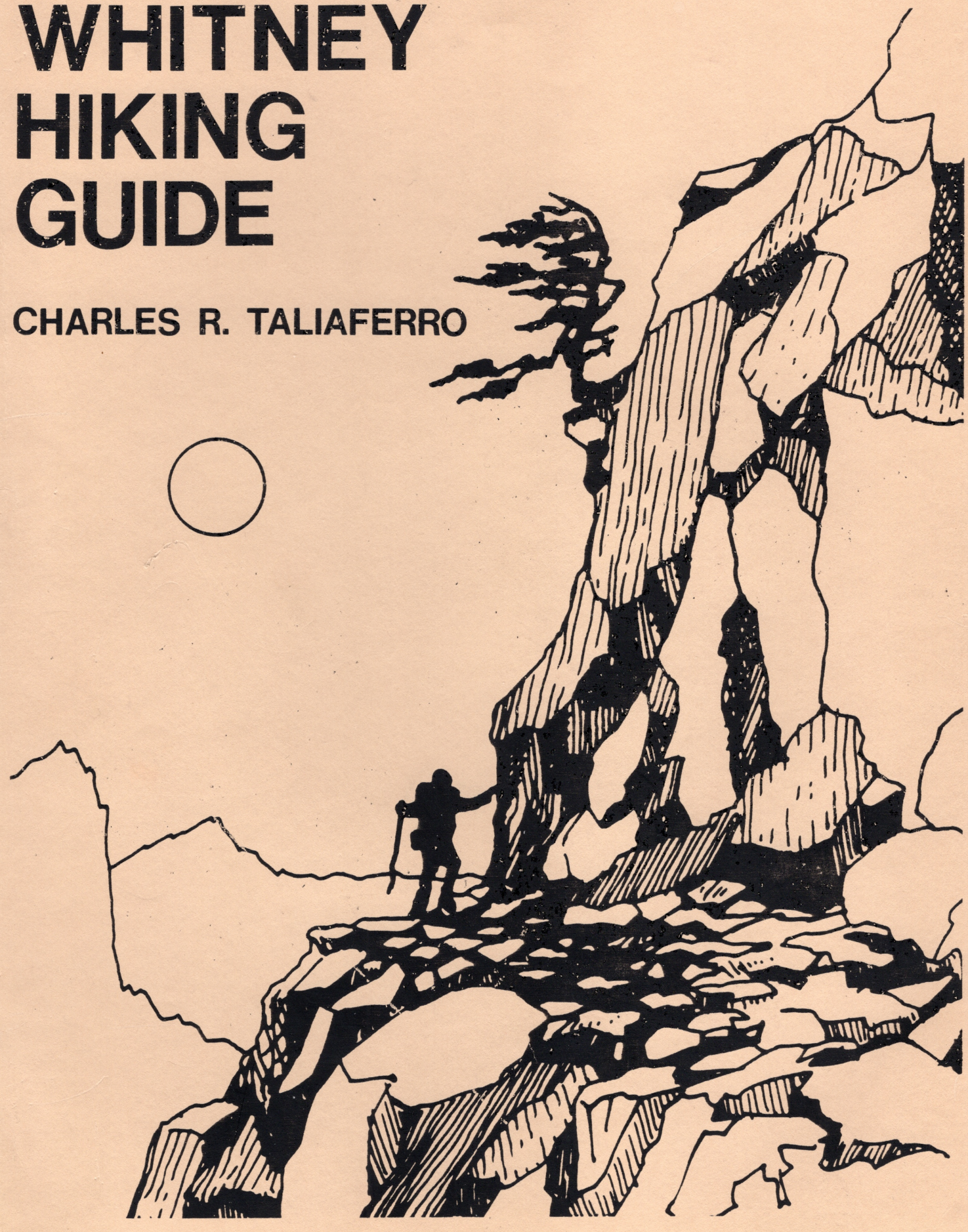
MOUNT WHITNEY HIKING GUIDE

CHARLES R. TALIAFERRO



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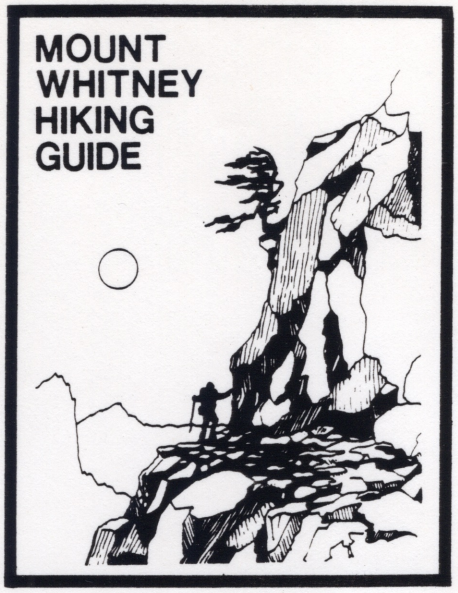

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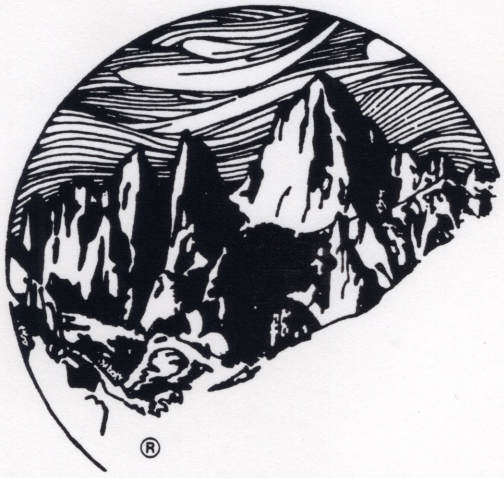

HIGH SIERRA ADVENTURES®

TRAILHEAD
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This Guide is affectionately dedicated to DICK and LEE MORENO. My wife and I first met them when they were stranded south of Lone Pine where their Volvo had broken down. We assisted by taking them up to their cabin in Whitney Portal. Since then, Dick and Lee have become part of our family. Dick is an extremely talented musician and singer, and does some of the most remarkable character impersonations that I have ever heard, especially John Wayne (Pilgrim). Dick and Lee opened my eyes with three valuable lessons:

There is more to life than increasing its speed. - GANDHI

Solvency is entirely a matter of temperament and not income. - LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

There is no cure for birth and death save to enjoy the interval. - GEORGE SANTAYANA

JOHN MUIR and MOUNT WHITNEY

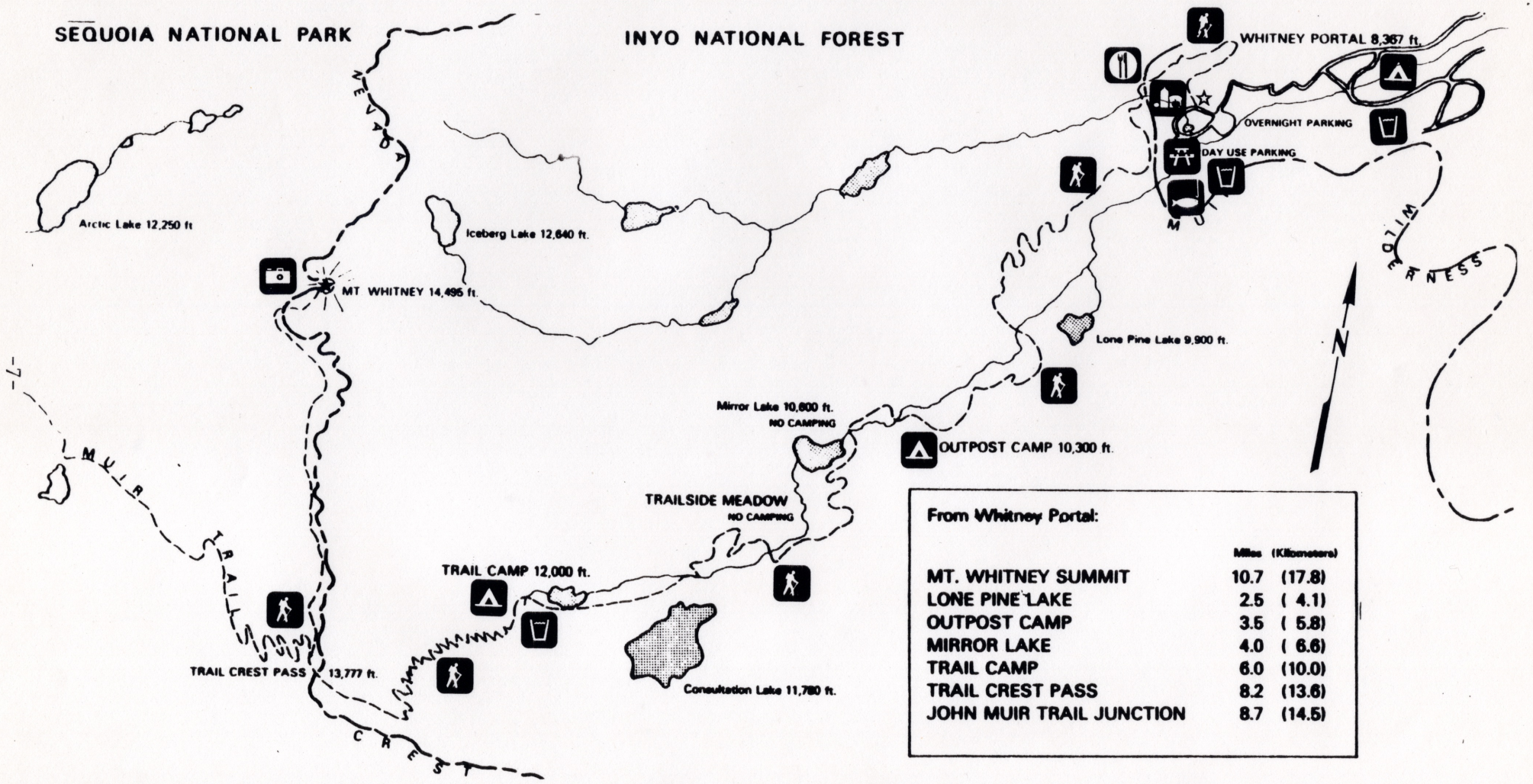
In October of 1873, John Muir reached the base of Mount Whitney at sunset. He spent the night climbing. "I was among summit needles by midnight or 11 o'clock. Had to dance all night to keep from freezing. Was feeble and starving next morning and had to turn back without gaining the top. Was exhausted ere I reached horse and camp and food."

Although fatigued, John Muir returned to Independence, obtained food and slept through the next day. But he didn't give up, "set out afoot for the summit by direct course up the east side." He spent the night at Mount Whitney's base. The following morning Muir hiked up the North Fork of Lone Pine Creek, stopping for the night at timberline. At eight o'clock on the morning of October 21, 1873, John Muir had reached the summit of Mount Whitney. He discovered Clarence King's record and a souvenir left by Carl Rabe on September 6, 1873.

Muir took in the beautiful views, made some drawings, and returned to the base of the mountains, retracing his steps. The following day he was in Independence. Years later, Muir wrote, "For climbers there is a canyon which comes down from the north shoulder of the Whitney Peak. Well-seasoned limbs will enjoy the climb of 9000 feet required for this direct route, but soft, succulent people should go the mule way."

In 1875, Muir made another visit to the summit of Mount Whitney, accompanied by two companions, Bayley and Washburn. Muir wrote of their descent, "We left the summit about noon and swooped to the torrid plains before sundown, as if dropping out of the sky."

"The mountains are calling and I must go." -JOHN MUIR



From Whitney Portal:

	Miles	(Kilometers)
MT. WHITNEY SUMMIT	10.7	(17.8)
LONE PINE LAKE	2.5	(4.1)
OUTPOST CAMP	3.5	(5.8)
MIRROR LAKE	4.0	(6.6)
TRAIL CAMP	6.0	(10.0)
TRAIL CREST PASS	8.2	(13.6)
JOHN MUIR TRAIL JUNCTION	8.7	(14.5)

☆TRAILHEAD ★ MOUNT WHITNEY SUMMIT CAMPING STORE & RESTAURANT

WATER PICNIC AREA FISHING TAKE A PICTURE ATOP MOUNT WHITNEY

MOUNT WHITNEY TRAIL

The 10.7-mile Mount Whitney Trail leads to the highest peak in the contiguous United States. It is the most frequently climbed peak in the Sierra Nevada, and perhaps the entire united States. The view from the summit can only be described as spectacular. This mountain was named after Josiah Dwight Whitney, Chief of the California Geological Survey from 1860 to 1874. The top of Mount Whitney is approximately the size of a football field, almost level, with a slight downward slope toward the west. The surface area is littered with massive granite slabs and boulders which have a distinctive form of weathering called nivation, caused by the continued action of frost. Mount Whitney was first climbed on August 18, 1873 by four men from Lone Pine. The first woman to reach its summit was in 1878. A trail was built to the top in 1904. The stone hut at the summit was constructed in 1909 and still stands.

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: The trailhead is located 100-yards east of the Whitney Portal Store & Restaurant, on the north side of the paved road. Whitney Portal can be reached by driving 13-miles west of Lone Pine on Whitney Portal Road. Whitney Portal Road intersects U. S. Highway 395 at the traffic signal in the center of Lone Pine. The paved road is normally open from May to early November. In winter the last six-miles of the road are not plowed.

TRAILHEAD ELEVATION: 8,365-feet.

HIGHEST ELEVATION: 14,494.164-feet.

ON ROUTE DISTANCES AND TRAIL ELEVATIONS:

1. Enters John Muir Wilderness, 0.5-miles, 8,480-feet.
2. Lone Pine Lake junction, 2.5-miles, 9,420-feet.
3. Outpost Camp, 3.5-miles, 10,365-feet.
4. Mirror Lake, 4.0-miles, 10,640-feet. (NO CAMPING)
5. Trailside Meadows, 5.0-miles, 11,395-feet. (NO CAMPING)
6. Trail Camp, 6.0-miles, 12,039-feet.
7. Trail Crest (enters Sequoia National Park), 8.2-miles, 13,777-feet.
8. John Muir Trail, 8.7-miles, 13,480-feet.
9. Mount Whitney summit, 10.7-miles, 14,494.164-feet.

TRAIL DIFFICULTY: Moderate to strenuous, especially to those hikers not in good physical condition or not acclimated to high altitudes. Altitude sickness can be a problem, and many hikers will reach Whitney Portal a day early and spend the night prior to making the hike -it makes for better physical comfort in making the trek up the steep portions of the trail and the high altitude.

SEASON: Normally, the trail is free of snow from mid-July to early October. Ice patches often remain on the switchbacks above Trail Camp all summer long.

WEATHER: Summer days can be warm at lower elevations. Temperatures at the summit are usually quite cool. Night temperatures often drop to freezing or below, even in the summer months. Afternoon thunderstorms are common. Snowstorms occur from mid-September to May.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: A staff can aid you in walking and climbing. Ice axe and crampons can come in real handy, and add to your safety, if you plan on making the hike in the spring or early summer. This is especially true when there are icy conditions on the switchbacks above Trail Camp.

WATER: Water is available near the trail as far as Trail Camp. Carry water to the summit as there is no dependable source. Giardiasis is a problem and you should treat all water you obtain on route. Good drinking water is available at Whitney Portal from a faucet next to the restroom, southeast of the pond. You should fill-up prior to commencing your hike.

BEARS: Not a problem.

TRAILHEAD FACILITIES:

UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE CAMPGROUNDS. The camping sites are available on a first come/first-served basis with the exception of the group campground sites where reservations are required.

1. Whitney Portal, 1.0-mile east of the Portal itself. This is a 44-unit family campground with flush toilets and good piped water. The cost is $7.00 per day.

2. Whitney Portal Backpackers Campground, is located south of the paved overnight parking area. Features 10 walk-in sites, one night limit, costs $3.00.

3. Whitney Portal Group Campground, 3 group sites available by reservation only at $18.00 per day per site. Contact: Inyo Recreation Enterprises, P. O. Box 295, Bishop, CA 93514 or telephone (619) 873-5822.

4. Lone Pine Campground, 7-miles west of Lone Pine on Whitney Portal Road at an elevation of 6,500-feet. 38 tent or RV spaces (22-ft RV limit). Vault toilets, piped water, tables, stoves. Open all year. No piped water from November to May. Cost: $5.00 per day.

COUNTY OF INYO CAMPGROUNDS. The camping sites are available on a first come/first-served basis. Cost per day varies and are not listed.

1. Diaz Lake, 3-miles south of Lone Pine on Highway 395, at an elevation of 3,700-feet, 200 tent or RV spaces, flush toilets, piped water, tables, stoves, restaurant, fishing. Open all year.

2. Portagee Joe Campground, 3/4's-mile southwest of Lone Pine on Tuttle Creek Road, at an elevation of 3,750-feet, 15 tent or RV spaces (30-ft RV limit). Pit toilets, piped water, tables, stoves. Open all year.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

1. Tuttle Creek Campground, 6-miles southwest of Lone Pine off Horseshoe Meadows Road, at an elevation of 5,120-feet, 85 tent or RV spaces. Pit toilets, piped water, tables, stoves. Open May through October. No fee charged.

NOTE: The campgrounds at Whitney Portal are usually open from May 15th to October 15th.

PICNIC AREA: Located at the end of the Whitney Portal Road where it makes a loop. This is a day use area with picnic tables, grills, and a fishing pond where you can catch Rainbow Trout which are planted on a regular basis by the California Department of Fish and Game. You do need, however, a license to take advantage of the fishing. Do not camp in this area, because if you do, you can be cited by a USFS Ranger.

TRAVEL TRAILERS & MOTOR HOMES: The paved road to Whitney Portal is very steep and has several switchbacks. Towing travel trailers is not recommended. RV camping past the Whitney Portal Group Campground is not permitted by the USFS.

GENERAL STORE & RESTAURANT: Jerry and Jan Kisker operate the Whitney Portal Store and Restaurant from mid-May to mid-September. No telephone is available, but you can usually reach them on CB channel 19. They stock a wide variety of food, backpacking gear, maps, post cards, guides, and their "world famous" Mount Whitney T-Shirt. The restaurant menu is varied, and everything from steaks to hamburgers is served. Soft drinks, beer, wine and coolers are sold. You can eat inside or on the scenic patio, next to a flowing brook. Weary hikers can get a hot shower and towel for a reasonable fee. Parking by the store is very limited.

PARKING: Parking is limited, especially on weekends and holidays. Backpackers and hikers must park in the overnight area reserved for them. Just watch for the "No Parking" signs and painted red curbs if there is any doubt in your mind. Violations are subject to citation or even being towed. During the 1986 season, a large group of vehicles were towed into Lone Pine because they were blocking the Whitney Portal exit (or east-bound lane), they also received a citation. All this can be quite expensive if you do not park in the indicated sites. Overflow parking is located on the south shoulder of Whitney Portal Road, 500-feet east of the Overnight Parking Area. It's a good idea to chock your vehicle's wheels here.

MAPS: USGS (15-minute quads), Mt. Whitney and Lone Pine, California. USFS, John Muir Wilderness & Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks topographic map set (15-minute scale), available from the Mt. Whitney Ranger Station, USFS, P. O. Box 8, Lone Pine, CA 93545 for $3.00 postpaid.

MOUNT WHITNEY TRAIL REGULATIONS: On your hike you will notice backcountry rangers, they are there to help you and to keep the wilderness unspoiled and undamaged, so please cooperate with them.

1. A wilderness permit is required for all overnight hikes. The United States Forest Service is no longer able to provide a reservation service for wilderness permits for the Mt. Whitney Trail. Effective in 1987, the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association (ESIA), a non-profit organization, will be handling the reservations for the Mt. Whitney Trail. A $5.00 per person non-refundable reservation fee will be in effect in 1987 for confirmed reservation on the Mt. Whitney Trail. This fee has become necessary in order to offset the additional costs involved with providing this special service for the public. The trailhead quota period in 1987 is May 22nd through September 30th. Advance reservation applications will only be accepted by written request with postmarks dated

March 1st through May 31st. Since March 1st is a Sunday, applications postmarked March 2nd will be processed with the March 1st date. Checks or money orders should be made payable to ESIA, and sent along with the application to: Wilderness Reservation, P. O. Box 8, Lone Pine, CA 93545. Please do not send cash. Bad checks will cause permit cancellation. If a reservation cannot be confirmed, your reservation fee will be returned. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for processing. Reservations for all other quota trails will be accepted in this same format, but no fee will be charged. For additional information, contact the USFS, Mt. Whitney Ranger District, (619) 876-5542.

2. Mirror Lake and Trailside Meadow are closed to overnight camping.

3. Campfires are not permitted; portable gas stoves are recommended. Wood fires in heavily used areas result in physical damage to the wilderness and impair the natural beauty of the landscape. Fires are prohibited in adjacent Sequoia National Park above the 11,200-foot level.

4. Pack and saddle stock are prohibited.

5. A valid State of California fishing license is required for fishing. State of California fishing regulations apply in the John Muir Wilderness and Sequoia National Park backcountry.

6. Discharging of firearms in the wilderness is permitted only for taking of wildlife as allowed by state law. No hunting is allowed in the National Parks.

7. Trail switchbacks are expensive to construct and maintain. Shortcutting them hastens destructive erosion and is illegal.

8. Pets and firearms are not allowed in Sequoia National Park.

9. Toilets have been installed at the summit, Outpost and Trail Camp to protect water quality. These are not trash cans! They are extremely expensive to maintain, so please pack out all trash.

LEARN TO CAMP WITHOUT A TRACE

Every visitor shares the responsibility to keep the wilderness unspoiled and undamaged, so pack out all your trash, leave nothing but your footprints, and take with you the memory that you left the wilderness a little better than when you arrived.

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." -Aldo Leopold (1886-1948)

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." -THOREAU

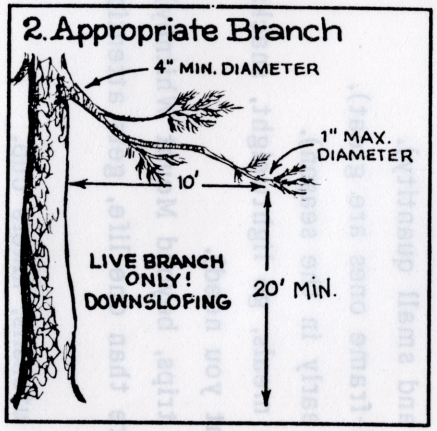
"Mountains are earth's undying monuments." -HAWTHORNE

"The Promised Land always lies on the other side of a wilderness." - HAVELOCK ELLIS

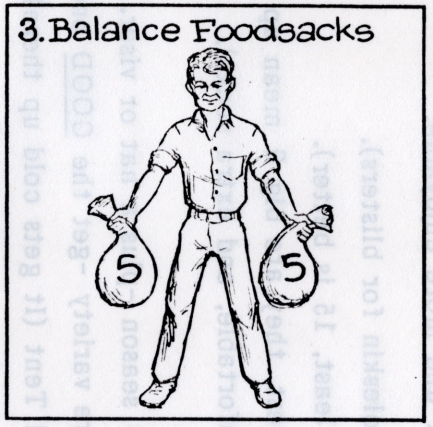
BACKCOUNTRY FOOD STORAGE

BEARS ARE VERY CLEVER, ANY DEVIATION FROM THIS METHOD WILL NOT PROTECT YOUR FOOD

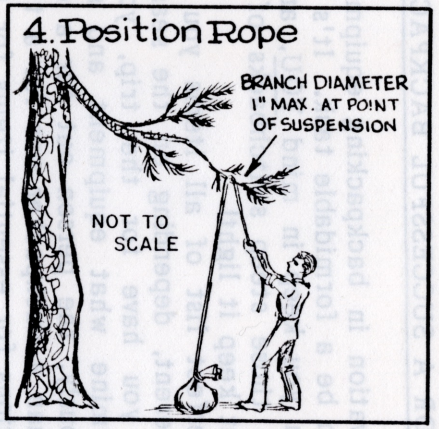
Find tree with appropriate branch, even if you have to walk ¼ mile



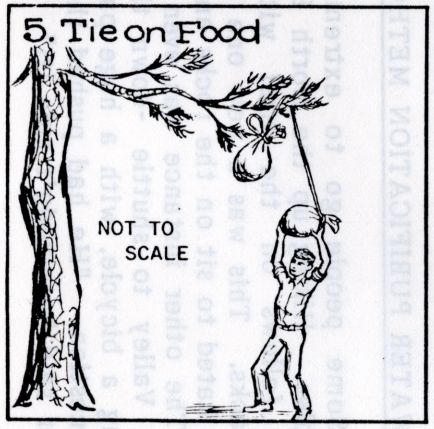
No object that could support bear below branch



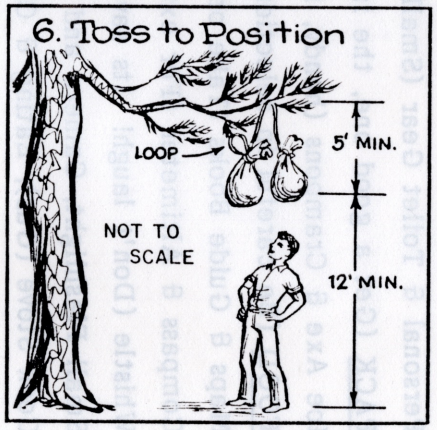
Equal weight;
10 lb. max per sack



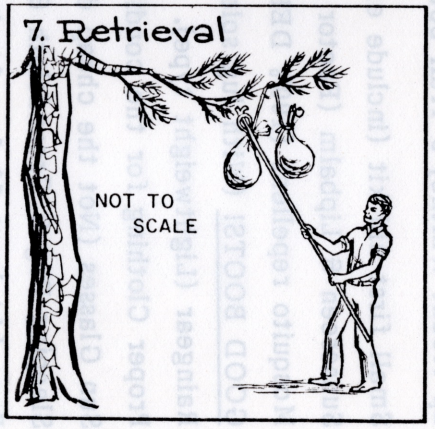
As far out on branch as will support weight of food, not cub



With one sack hoisted to branch, tie second sack as high as possible



Tie a secure loop in rope near one sack for retrieval; put excess rope in sack



Hook loop with stick and pull down

TIPS:

1) Store cosmetics, toothpaste,soap etc., with food.

2) Leave pack on ground with pockets and flaps open.

3) Food taken by bears is still your responsibility; please clean up.

4) Make sure no branches or solid objects are under food for bear to stand on.

5) Use steel cables when provided.

ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL BACKPACKING TRIP

With today's technology and innovation in backpacking equipment, picking the essential from the non-essential can be a formidable task. It's a lot easier to choose your gear and supplies when you keep in mind YOU, and NO ONE ELSE will be lugging it up and down those steep switchbacks of the Mount Whitney Trail. Take what you need -but keep it light!

There is no such thing as a "perfect list of all items you will need!" Each ascent of Mount Whitney is different, depending on the season, current weather conditions, amount of time you have for the trip, your physical condition, etc. Only YOU can determine what equipment and supplies are required on a particular outing. Obviously, the person out for a day hike on Whitney's slopes will need much less than a backpacker our for a two or three day excursion. Below are some suggestions for essential items for making your hike up Mount Whitney's Trail both safer and more enjoyable:

1. Small first aid kit (include extra moleskin for blisters).
2. Sunscreen & Lipbalm (Factor 10 at least, 15 is better).
3. Mosquito repellent (100% DEET is best, they are big & mean up there).
4. GOOD BOOTS! (With lug soles, comfortable, and extra socks).
5. Raingear (Lightweight type).
6. Proper Clothing for the conditions & season -plus a hat or visor.
7. Sun Glasses (Not the cheap drugstore variety -get the GOOD ones).
8. Sleeping Bag & Groundcloth & Small Tent (It gets cold up there).
9. Rope (At least 50-feet for hanging food or emergencies).
10. Personal & Toilet Gear (Small sizes and small quantity).
11. PACK (Get a good one, the internal-frame ones are great).
12. Ice Axe & Crampons (handy, it it's early in the season).
13. FOOD (Be careful in selection, plan meals, go lightweight, snacks).
14. Maps & Guide Books (Take only what you need).
15. Compass & Altimeter (For extended trips, beyond Mount Whitney).
16. Whistle (Don't laugh! Its saved more than one life, gets attention).
17. Small Flashlight, Camera and Film.
18. Cook Stove (Gas), Eating & Cooking utensils, hikers cup.
19. Canteen (Or water bottles, ones that won't break or leak).
20. WATER PURIFICATION METHOD (Boiling - Iodine - Tablets - Filter).

Some people go to extremes, and this past summer I saw two good examples. Hiking up the North Fork of Oak Creek to Baxter Pass, I observed three fellows on the trail with lightweight lawnchairs strapped to their backpacks. This was a new one for me, and when questioned, one person said "they hated to sit on the rocks and wanted comfort!"

The other instance was even more bizarre. I'm waiting for some folks at Onion Valley to shuttle -down the trail from Kearsarge Pass walks this guy pushing a bicycle, with a huge pack on his back. I couldn't resist asking him the question. "He had pushed the bike all the way from Sequoia because the Ranger said he couldn't ride it!" Do YOURSELF a favor, go lightweight!

MOUNT WHITNEY TRAVEL TIPS

One of the most important parts of your trip will take place at home. Careful planning and preparation are essential to a safe and enjoyable ascent of Mount Whitney. Here are a few tips to keep in mind as you prepare for your assault of Mount Whitney's summit.

TRIP PLAN: Plan your trip from start to finish before leaving home. Study your maps. Prepare an itinerary, check elevations, distance, obtain your wilderness permit. Be certain to include any medication that you require, and make a note to yourself so you won't forget.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME: Leave your itinerary with a relative or friend. Write a full description of your trip. Include the names of all party members, where and when you will enter the wilderness, planned route with overnight campsite locations indicated, and where and when you plan to exit.

Don't forget to do some conditioning before leaving home. Huffing and puffing throughout your trip can be reduced if you get in shape. Be sure your fellow hikers do too. Take day hikes and exercise at least several weeks before the trip. Carefully check all your gear for any potential problems.

WILDERNESS HAZARDS: The wilderness environment presents many hazards not commonly encountered in our daily lives. Enjoy the challenge of the wilderness but do not take unnecessary risks. Be prepared for changing trail and weather conditions.

HIKING SEASON: Normally, the Mount Whitney Trail is free of ice and snow from July to September. Snow or ice may be encountered year round in sheltered locations such as north facing slopes or on the switchbacks above Trail Camp. Early in the season, the Mount Whitney Trail will have wet and muddy patches. Stay on the trail! Going around the trail results in unsightly "double ruts" or trail widening or even erosion. Have your hiking boots well sealed, ready for wet conditions.

STORMS: Afternoon and evening thunderstorms are common during the summer and early fall; be prepared to descend to a lower and less exposed location if a storm threatens. AVOID OPEN AREAS such as ridges, the summit, or even meadows during a storm. This is especially important when there are electrical discharges (lightning). Reminiscing years later, Dr. Alexander G. McAdie wrote: "The season was a rainy one. We had some five out of seven rainy days. We had thunderstorms below us. On one occasion the hairs on the burros stood out straight, I think if the storm had been a trifle more intense there would have been four or five dead astronomers on the summit" [Mount Whitney].

Lightning can be terribly unforgiving, so be careful during a storm.

HYPOTHERMIA: Hypothermia, or the rapid loss of body heat, is the number one killer of outdoor recreationists. If your party is exposed to cold (50°F or lower), wet, and wind -THINK HYPOTHERMIA. Put on warm, waterproof clothing before you become cold and wet. Watch party members for these symptoms: shivering, poor coordination, stumbling, slurred speech, exhaustion, and apparent unconcern about physical discomfort. If such behavior is observed, find shelter from wind and rain. Restore body temperature: get the victim out of wet clothes and into a warm sleeping bag. Skin to skin contact with another person is the most effective warming method. Provide warm drinks. When fit

for travel, get the victim into protective clothing to avoid further heat loss.

ALTITUDE SICKNESS: May occur from over exertion at high altitudes where the oxygen supply is reduced. Allow time for your body to become acclimated to high elevation. Spend a day at Whitney Portal before you start your hike, this will assist you greatly in making a successful climb. Symptoms include headache, fatigue, appetite loss, nausea, and shortness of breath. Victims should stop, rest, and eat small amounts of quick energy foods. Aspirin may be helpful, If symptoms persist, return to a lower elevation.

WATER: Giardiasis, an intestinal disease caused by the protozoan Giardia lamblia, is an increasing problem to hikers throughout the Sierra. The Mount Whitney Trail, and the water you obtain along it, is not an exception. Giardia is carried in human and animal feces and may contaminate water sources. Human waste should be buried at least six inches deep and 100-feet away from lakes and streams. The USFS recommends boiling all backcountry water for three minutes. Chemical treatment is not considered as reliable as heat for killing this parasite. Speaking for myself, for the past three years, my wife and I have used one of the water filtering units with great success -and no problems. They are expensive initially, but save a great deal of weight not having to carry so many metal propane bottles. If you go this route, get a good filter and not one of the cheap ones that make claims they cannot possibly keep. Read the filter label and ascertain how small a particle it can filter.

BEARS: While bears along the Mount Whitney Trail have not been a problem, it's a good idea for you to know something about them. Most large mammals steer clear of anything smelling of humans. The exception is the California Black Bear. These bears are extremely intelligent and adaptable. I have observed bears get food from backpacks using methods that were outright creative and sophisticated. Many areas of the adjacent Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are as popular with bears as they are with hikers. Proper food storage is mandatory for your safety and the bears health. Carry at least 50-feet of strong rope to securely hang your food, using the counter-balance method. Use bear cables where available. Failure to properly store food is a federal offense subject to citation.

Keep your campsite, especially the cooking area, clean. Don't sleep in clothes you wore while cooking. Hang anything that has an odor (including soap, toothpaste, and trash) with your food any time you will be away from your campsite. Read the bear brochure which was included with your wilderness permit.

CLOTHING: Warm clothing is essential. Wool and fiberpile are good choices; these materials retain warmth even when wet. Use the layering system of clothing.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

1. FIRE - HIGHWAY PATROL/SHERIFF - AMBULANCE/MEDICAL: DIAL 911
2. WEATHER INFORMATION (Owens Valley): (619) 873-3213
3. HIGHWAY CONDITIONS: (619) 873-6366
4. TRAILHEAD SHUTTLE SERVICE: (619) 878-2333

Clarence King
(1842-1901)
MOUNTAINEERING IN THE SIERRA NEVADA

JULY 6, 1864

"At last I reached the top, and, with the greatest caution, worked my body over the brink, and rolling out upon the smooth surface of the granite, looked over and watched Cotter make his climb. He came up steadily, with no sense of nervousness, until he got to the narrow part of the ice, and here he stopped and looked up with forlorn face to me; and he asked if it had occurred to me that we had, by-and-by, to go down again.

"We had now an easy slope to the summit, and hurried up over rocks and ice, reaching the crest at exactly twelve o'clock. I rang my hammer upon the topmost rock; we grasped hands, and I reverently named the grand peak "Mount Tyndall."*

"To our surprise, upon sweeping the horizon with my level, there appeared two peaks equal in height with us, and two rising even higher. That which looked highest of all was a cleanly cut helmet of granite upon the same ridge with Mount Tyndall, lying about six miles south, and fronting the desert with a bold square bluff which rises to the crest of the peak, where a white fold of snow trims it gracefully.

"Mount Whitney, as we afterwards called it in honor of our chief, is probably the highest land within the United States. Its summit looked glorious, but inaccessible."

*Mount Tyndall [Sequoia National Park]. The name honors John Tyndall (1820-1893), well-known British scientist and Alpinist.

Then it seemed to me the Sierra should be called not the Nevada or Snowy Range, but the Range of Light. And after ten years spent in the heart of it, rejoicing and wondering, bathing in the glorious floods of light, seeing the sunbursts of morning among the icy peaks, the noonday radiance on the trees and rocks and snow, the flush of the alpenglow, and a thousand dashing waterfalls with their marvelous abundance of irised spray, it still seems to me above all others the Range of Light, the most divinely beautiful of all the mountain chains I have ever seen.

JOHN MUIR
(1838-1914)

MOUNT WHITNEY

THE HISTORY | THE FIRST ASCENT | TRAIL CONSTRUCTION

MOUNT WHITNEY is located west of Lone Pine, California, in Inyo County, at latitude 36-44-44, longitude 118-17-29.

This majestic peak dates from the Paleozoic period, and undoubtedly the first humans to view its magnificence were the Pinto people, over three-thousand years ago. Then the Paiute Indians of Owens Valley.

The first white man to enter Owens Valley was Joseph Walker in February of 1834. It's entirely possible that Walker, unknowningly, viewed Mount Whitney. On November 27, 1845, John C. Fremont and his third expedition was at Walker Lake. Fremont devided his exploration party, sending the main body under the command of his topographer and artist, Edward M. Kern, south along the Sierras to reunite later at Tulare Lake (Nevins). Joseph Walker was among this group of hearty adventurers. The men traveled south, through Owens Valley, along the base of the Sierra escarpment. Once again, these mountainmen must have seen Mount Whitney, but were unaware of its significance. Others to travel through Owens Valley during this early period include Surveyor A. W. Von Schmidt, Col. Edward F. Beale, and Dr. Darwin French. They make no mention of Mount Whitney -they saw it, but didn't know it!

Although Mount Whitney is the highest peak in the contiguous United States, it was almost seventy-five years after Mount Shasta, Mount Hood and Mount Ranier were discovered that Mount Whitney became known to the public. A good part of this reason may be blamed on the fact that while the other mountains stand out in splendor, Mount Whitney is remote, almost coyly, in a barrier of other peaks. Walt Wheelock and Tom Condon, in their book "Climbing Mount Whitney" (La Siesta Press), said, "Whitney is a shy mountain."

In 1860, the California State Legislature, troubled by a number of disputes over the exact location of the California-Nevada state line, authorized the formation of the California Geological Survey, and appointed Josiah Dwight Whitney as the State Geologist. One of the reasons for determining the state boundaries was underscored by the problems between Mono County (California) and Esmeralda County (Nevada) over the location of the town of Aurora. Both Mono and Esmeralda counties claimed it as their county seat. After the Ives and Kidder survey placed Aurora in Nevada Territory, Mono County moved its seat to Bridgeport.

However, this seemed of little importance to the legislature and directed Whitney to start his surveys in the Coast Ranges of Southern California. The Coastal Range survey occupied the year 1861 and they moved north in 1862 to work, climaxing that survey with a climb up 14,162-foot Mount Shasta.

A member of the Whitney survey party was Professor William H. Brewer,

of Yale University, who wrote some enthusiastic letters back to his eastern colleagues and so fired the enthusiasm of Clarence King and James T. Gardiner, both graduates of Yale's Scientific School in New Haven, Connecticut.

Leaving New Haven, King and Gardiner crossed the plains and the Sierras, and by chance met up with Brewer on a Sacramento River steamer in 1863. King volunteered to join the Survey as an assistant to Brewer. Gardiner got temporary work with the Army Engineers in San Francisco. The following year he joined the Whitney Survey to explore the High Sierra.

The summer of 1864 found the party working along the course of the Kings River, and Brewer and his topographer, Charles F. Hoffmann, climbed the highest peak they coud find in that area on July 2, 1864. Brewer writes, "Hoffmann and I climbed this cone. The view was wilder than we have ever seen before. Such a landscape! A hundred peaks in sight over thirteen thousand feet -many very sharp -deep canyons, cliffs in every direction, sharp ridges almost inacessible to man on which human foot has never trod -all combine to produce a view the sublimity of which is rarely equaled, one which few are privileged to behold" (Farquhar). The peak was named Mount Brewer by the Whitney Survey.

Brewer wrote, "We were not on the highest peak, although we were a thousand feet higher than we anticipated any peaks were. We had not supposed there were any over 12,000 or 12,500, while we were actually up over 13,600, and there were a dozen peaks in sight as high or higher."

When the party returned to camp and told of this array of peaks it created great excitemet. Clarence King was particularly interested in scaling the highest peak. Brewer consented to King making the attempt.

Brewer noted in his diary, "King is enthusiastic, is wonderfully tough, has the greatest endurance I have ever seen, and is withal very muscular."

Plans were made, packs provisioned for a six-day attempt. On July 4, 1864, a party consisting of Brewer, Gardiner, King and a packer, Richard D. Cotter, started out. Brewer and Gardiner left King and Cotter at the 13,000-foot level for another visit to Mount Brewer.

King and Cotter, through untold hardships and individual determination, crossed the divide into the Kern River basin and reaching their mountain goal, prepared for their ascent. Starting before first light. Climbing over blocks of granite, snow and ice, often having to cut toe-holds, they made the summit, and, according to King, ". . . without serious difficulty, after some risky climbing."

On July 6, 1864, King and Cotter stood atop the highest peak of the Sierra Nevadas as yet ascended my man. Yet, to their amazement, there were two peaks within sight that were higher. They named the highest of these Mount Whitney, in honor of their chief, Josiah D. Whitney.

King realized that he couldn't reach the high peak he saw as this time. Food and supplies were almost exhausted, so the duo packed up their instruments and gear and started down. The descent was not without adventure, but they made it back to their basecamp, thence to Visalia.

King asked for another chance to climb the mountain and permission was given by Brewer. This time he started out with an escort of two cavalrymen, a pack horse and two weeks rations. He left Visalia on July 14th and rode up the newly constructed Hockett Trail, along the South Fork of the Kaweah River and on east, to the Kern where the trail ended. King crossed the Kern Plateau and started up a canyon to the north of Mount Langley. It was a poor route and they were soon stopped by a sheer cliff, some 400-feet from the top, and was forced to turn back without meeting his goal.

On the basis of King's report, Whitney was to write:

"Mt. Whitney is a ridge having somewhat the outline of a helmet, the

perpendicular face being turned toward the east. There is snow on its summit, which indicates there must be a flat surface there. The mountain is the culminating point of an immense pile of granite which is cut almost to the centre by numerous steep and vertical canyons. This mountain has been approached from all sides, except the east, and found to be absolutely inaccessible."

After that, the attention of the party was directed to running a boundary survey around Yosemite.

In 1867, Clarence King was appointed the United States Geologist, the forerunner of the U. S. Geological Survey which he was later to become the first chief (1879-1881). In July 1871, King was working on a survey of the Fortieth Parallel. Leaving his field party, he went to San Francisco for provisions and supplies. Returning to his workers, which were now in Wyoming, King took a side-trip. He had never given up the idea of being the first to ascend Mount Whitney, and he saw his chance. Taking the stage out of Carson City on to Lone Pine, he arrived on the second day. King writes, "For two days storm-curtains hung low about the Sierra base," the sun appeared and he could see "the sharp terrible crest of Whitney." He recalled "the impossibility of making a climb up the northern precipices and at once chose the more southern gorge" for his attempt. King hired Paul Pinson and a boy to take care of the stock, and rode to the base of the Sierras where he was to begin his climb.

King wrote an account of a terrifying climb and climaxed his report by stating, "Above us, but thirty feet rose a crest, beyond which we saw nothing. I dared not think it the summit till we stood there, and Mount Whitney was under our feet." Continuing, he said, "Close beside us a small mound of rock was piled upon the peak, and solidly built into it an Indian arrow-shaft, pointed due west."

Indians wouldn't make a pile of rocks and place an arrow in it, but probably an indication that a white man had made the summit prior to Clarence King. King described the vista from the top, "Sombre storm-clouds and their even gloomier shadows darkened the northern sea of peaks. Only a few bars of sudden light flashed in upon granite and fields of ice. The rocky tower of Mount Tyndall, thrust up through rolling billows, caught for a moment the full light, and then sank into darkness and mist." But alas, he was not looking at Mount Tyndall at all, but the real Mount Whitney, King was on the wrong mountain.

In 1873, W. A. Goodyear, a former member of the State Geological Survey, made the climb in company with Mortimer W. Belshaw, of Cerro Gordo mining fame. Goodyear reported to the California Academy of Sciences:

"On the 27th day of July, 1873, Mr. M. W. Belshaw, of Cerro Gordo, and myself, rode our mules to the highest crest of a peak southwest of Lone Pine, which, for over three years has been known by the name of Mt. Whitney, and which was measured and ascended as such by Mr. Clarence King, in the summer of 1871 . . . it is by no means the highest of the grand cluster of peaks which form the culminating portion of the Sierra Nevada; nor is it the peak which was discovered by Prof. W. H. Brewer and party, in 1864, and originally named by them Mount Whitney."

King read this report in the Academy's Proceedings and remembered that his barometric altitude at the time had been 500-feet lower than expected and that he had blamed it on the storm; he hastened to admit the error.

He was confounded by this turn of events and was greatly disappointed. King immediately left the East and journeyed to Visalia. Hiring two men he once again headed up the Hockett Trail to the Kern River. This time he was successful in the climb, arriving on the summit at eleven o'clock in the morning

on September 19, 1873. Clarence King had finally scaled the real Mount Whitney. However, King was not the first to ascend Mount Whitney as two parties had by now preceded him. But they did not document their climbs, although one, a party of fishermen, wanted to name the mountain "Fishermen's Peak."

It is generally acknowledged that in 1873, on August 18th, John Lucas, Charles D. Begole, and Albert H. Johnson, known as "the fishermen," made the first ascent of Mount Whitney.

Shortly thereafter, approximately August 20th, William Crapo and Abe Lyeda, made the climb. Crapo claimed that they had made the original climb on August 15th but was never able to substantiate it.

On September 6, 1973, William L. Hunter, Carl Rabe, William Crapo and Tom McDonough made the summit of Mount Whitney.

It was not until September 19, 1873, that Clarence King and Frank Knowles made it to the top.

As far as it can be determined, Josiah Dwight Whitney, for whom the mountain was named, never climbed it nor evidenced any interest in doing so. The name "Mount Whitney" was firmly established by 1881 when the summit was occupied by Professor S. P. Langley for observations of solar radiation.

There were no known ascents made in 1874. On October 3, 1875, Professor W. E. James and a party of eight companions made it to the Whitney summit. Professor James took sixteen photographs while his group was on the top.

You cannot ignore the accomplishments of the women hikers. In 1878 a party from Porterville traveled to Lone Pine and hiked to the summit of Mount Whitney. In their party was Mrs. R. C. Redd, Hope Broughton, Mary Martin and Anna Mills.

Next to enter the sanctity of the mountain was the United States Army which proclaimed Mount Whitney a military reservation on September 26, 1883. The Mount Whitney Military Reservation was a vast area of great beauty and included Mount Wlliamson on the north, Sheep Mountain on the south, and to Lone Pine on the eastern border. The Army wanted the reservation for their Signal Corps which operated the weather bureau of that day.

The United States Army held on to Mount Whitney and the surrounding area for twenty years. The Weather Bureau's operations was transferred to the Department of Agriculture and the War Department gave up its claim to the Reservation on September 23, 1903, turning it over to the Sierra Forest Reserve, Bureau of Forestry, Department of Agriculture.

During the summer of 1903, the largest party to date ascended Mount Whitney. The group consisted of 103 climbers led by Professor Alexander G. McAdie, who was forecast official (1895-1902) and in charge (1903-1913) of the United States Weather Bureau in San Francisco. Mount Whitney had attracted its first (but not last) crowd and seemed to have a magnetic attraction for scholarly types. Dr. McAdie reported to his superiors at the Weather Bureau that "Mt. Whitney, of all the extremely high peaks of the Pacific Coast is probably most suited for a meteorological observatory."

Just reaching the summit of Mount Whitney was a formidable task in those early days. It was much too difficult for horses or mules to make the trek. Yet many people wanted to attain its towering summit, just to be able to say with authority "that they had stood on the highest point in the United States without exception" (before Alaska).

The good hearted citizens of Lone Pine realized that a suitable trail, capable of being used by a loaded pack-train, needed to be built to the top of Mount Whitney. Through a lot of hard work and fund raising, sufficient money was gathered to construct a horse trail to Mount Whitney's summit.

On July 22, 1904, G. F. Marsh of Lone Pine wrote to Professor Alexander G. McAdie, "I'm glad to inform you that we completed the pack trail to the summit of Mt. Whitney last Sunday. We had three pack-trains loaded with wood, and one saddle horse. We had a large fire at night, and fireworks which were plainly seen at Lone Pine. The pack-train is in good shape and parties are going over it every day."

A tragedy struck one of the first scientific parties to use the newly built trail. Perhaps the mountain gods took exception to this invasion of their sanctuary, for on July 26, 1904, three members were struck by a bolt of lightning while eating their lunch. Dr. Barton Warren Evermann, Chief of the Division of Scientific Inquiry, United States Bureau of Fisheries, conducting a study of the Golden Trout of the Kern River region, and Dr. Jenkins were not injured, but Byrd Surby, his feet wet, was killed instantly.

We have already seen that Professor Samuel Pierpont Langley, then Director of the Allegheny Observatory, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, subsequently Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and aviation pioneer, choose Mount Whitney, at the suggestion of Clarence King, for making scientific observations of solar radiation.

Because of its remoteness and high elevation, Mount Whitney was a natural site for scientific research of the heavens. Dr. William Wallace Campbell, of the University of California's Lick Observatory and Dr. Charles G. Abbot of the Smithsonian Institution were both interested in using Mount Whitney's summit for scientific inquiry. Dr. Campbell wanted to study the spectrum of Mars, for "the purpose of detecting the presence of water vapor." "I realized," he says, "that the water in the Earth's atmosphere is the greatest obstacle in the way of success." Dr. Abbot wanted to continue Professor Langley's research into solar radiation.

By this time the trail's condition had deteriorated and was in no shape for travel or use my loaded pack-trains. In August of 1908, Dr.'s Campbell and Abbot hiked to the Mount Whitney crest for the following years observations and studies. They spent a miserable night on the summit, because of fatigue, exposure and altitude sickness.

The two scientists determined that some sort of shelter or even a substantial building was required to prevent exposure to the elements, especially during stormy periods. Dr. Campbell drew up plans for "a three-room hut with stone walls and steel roof and doors, to be used not primarily as an observatory, although it might be convenient to use a part of it occasionally as a darkroom for photography, but rather as a shelter and living quarters for observers in any banch of science."

Prior to building the shelter, the path to the crest had to be rebuilt. Once more G. F. Marsh got the job done. On July 28, 1909 the trail work was completed and Marsh immediately started construction of the stone structure. It was extremely hard going, due to the extreme altitude, wind, and sudden storms, but by the end of August 1909 the building was almost complete.

The people of Lone Pine had aided the scientific community once again by raising funds for the trail to be rebuilt and repaired, and construction of the stone hut. Dr. Campbell and Dr. Abbot were able to satisfactory perform their studies. The facilities atop Mount Whitney were now available for others to use in their studies and observations.

In 1913 the stone hut was used by the Smithsonian Institution, under Anders Angstrom, of Uppsala, Sweden, for measurement of nocturnal radiation. The United States Weather Bureau sent W. R. Gregg to make explorations of the upper atmosphere using captive balloons, "probably the first that have been carried on by captive balloons at altitudes exceeding 4000 meters."

Dr. Robert A. Millikan conducted a study of cosmic rays during the period 1922 to 1925, below Mount Whitney's summit.

On June 25, 1914, Silas Christofferson, flying a biplane, set a new American altitude record, when he flew over Mount Whitney's lofty summit.

Ever since, people having been climbing this jewel of the Sierras. Both young and old make this trek, which has almost become a pilgrimage for some. Some people take it slow going up the mountain, often taking as much as three days to gain its summit. Others make the round trip from Whitney Portal in one day, others run up and down its trail. In Ginny Smith's fine book, "The Deepest Valley," (Wilderness Press, Berkeley), she states, "The 1961 winner of the annual Mount Whitney Marathon covered the 21-mile roundtrip in 3 hours 55 minutes, so there is no further point in trying to make a record."

The more time you take to climb Mount Whitney the more pleasurable and enjoyable your trip will be.

Remember this; Mount Whitney is a mountain you can love, but you must absolutely respect her. It's entirely possible to love something to death and this is a distinct possibility with Mount Whitney. During 1986, there was a total of 10,625 successful ascents of Mount Whitney. Who knows how many tried to make it but didn't succeed.

It's easy to see that we must protect this national treasure -treat her as if she were your's -for she is you know!

Subsequent to World War II, in 1948, the United States Forest Service realigned the Mount Whitney Trail to what we have today.

WHAT IS THE ALTITUDE OF MOUNT WHITNEY?

Over the years, many elevations have been given Mount Whitney's summit. Below is a list of the generally accepted dates and figures:

1. 1864 - Clarence King, over 15,000-feet (estimate).

2. 1864? - Clarence King, 14,887-feet.

3. 1873 - Carl Rabe, 14,898-feet.

4. 1875 - The Wheeler Survey, 14,471-feet.

5. 1881 - Prof. Samuel P. Langley, 14,522-feet.

6. 1903 - Alexander G. McAdie, 14,515-feet.

7. 1905 - U. S. Geological Survey, 14,502-feet or 14,501-feet.

8. 1928 - U. S. Geological Survey, 14,495.811-feet.

9. 1940 - Coast and Geodetic Survey, 14,494.164-feet.

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APPLICATION FOR WILDERNESS PERMIT

(Send application to issuing agency for trail location.)

NAME:_____ DATE:_____

ADDRESS:_____

CITY:_____ STATE_____ ZIP:_____

ENTRY TRAIL:_____ EXIT TRAIL:_____

1st Choice Starting Date:_____ Ending Date:_____

2nd Choice Starting Date:_____ Ending Date:_____

3rd Choice Starting Date:_____ Ending Date:_____

4th Choice Starting Date:_____ Ending Date:_____

5th Choice Starting Date:_____ Ending Date:_____

Signature:_____ Number of People:_____

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If this Application for a Wilderness Permit is for the Mount Whitney Trail, include a check or money order payable to the EASTERN SIERRA INTERPRETIVE ASSOCIATION (E.S.I.A.) in the amount of number of people X $5.00 = $_____ amount enclosed. This is ONLY for the Mt. Whitney Trail, send application to: USFS, Mt. Whitney Ranger District, P. O. Box 8, Lone Pine, CA 93545, (619) 876-5542. No fee is charged for the other trails. If this application is for a trail other than in the Mt. Whitney Ranger District, please tear the bottom portion off this application to prevent confusion. Thank you!

CUT ALONG DOTTED LINES

NOTE: To increase your chances of getting a reservation, you are encouraged to list as many starting and ending dates as possible. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for your application to be processed.

APPLICATION FOR WILDERNESS PERMIT

(Send application to issuing agency for trail location.)

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE _____ ZIP: _____

ENTRY TRAIL: _____ EXIT TRAIL: _____

1st Choice Starting Date: _____ Ending Date: _____

2nd Choice Starting Date: _____ Ending Date: _____

3rd Choice Starting Date: _____ Ending Date: _____

4th Choice Starting Date: _____ Ending Date: _____

5th Choice Starting Date: _____ Ending Date: _____

Signature: _____ Number of People: _____

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